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Copenhagen Business School Studio, 3rd May 2013.

Address: 'Organisation Space': This was prepared as a script for the seminar and book launch, where references and clarifications were later added.

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I begin by thanking both the publisher Libri and CBS for making this event possible on the occasion of the launch of the book *Experiencing Organisations*. The book was produced through a difficult period for publishing – the big publishers we approached back in 2009 would simply not consider publishing a full colour run. Libri were interested, and after several meetings saw the vision of the project and committed themselves to it. It is great to have a number of the contributors here, although, it must be said, we originally chose a small number of contributors believing this to be a two-volume project. Because of financial constraints it became limited to one, and there were many people we wanted to include but we simply could not.

These contributors, were, as you know, drawn from the Aesthesis Project network – the many people who supported and contributed to the journal *Aesthesis: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics in Management and Organisational Life*. We funded six issues of *Aesthesis*, largely from the international *Art of Management and Organisation* conferences. Steve Taylor and Steve Linstead are continuing with this project in their own ways – American Steve with the journal *Organizational Aesthetics*, and British Steve with the conferences: the Sixth Art of Management and Organization conference in York University this last September (2012) was quite an extraordinary advance on the previous. I did not expect anyone to revive the conference in such a spectacular way. In fact, the book plays an interesting role in this: for the book becomes a kind of prelude to another, more adventurous, episode in the journey.

The journal *Aesthesis*, from which some of the chapters of the book were drawn, had many objectives. One of which was to bring together practitioners and scholars and to create spaces for dialogue and exchange; the other was to confront management and organization studies orthodoxies with the 'thinking' of art, aesthetics and creative practice'. This 'thinking' was of a different order than much scholarly thinking in academic research, which works by alternately by empirical description and quantification of case study objects, and abstract-conceptual theorization of the case's meaning and significance. Art and aesthetics work effectively when they *work* to

dissolve the radical distinction between empirical and theoretical. And by emphasizing the term *work*, I would draw attention to the way that art and aesthetics are not subjects that are controlled or easily managed by scholarly discourse; they have their own realms of work and activity, thought and life, which continue without the investigations of academics, and within which academics need to some extent become immersed if they are to understand it.

The book revolves around several questions:

- > How our understanding of the concept 'organisation' is formed. Not just 'Why do we think about organisations in the way we do?', but 'How can organizations think about themselves, or ask themselves questions about their invisible conventions, behaviours, practices and ideals?' The shape and structure of organisations seem so logical, pragmatic and even inevitable, and yet are historical, often formed by confused assumptions about *productivity* and *development*.
- > What is 'de-familiarisation', and how might it promote a means for organizations to develop their *self-knowledge*? Many organizations assume that their strategy documents give them an accurate picture of their modus operandi, shape and structure. Yet, organizations are not only historical but formed by *invisible forces....such as aesthetic forces*. How can organizations develop their self-reflexivity in this area?
- > How does *individuality* in management leadership provide a means for developing collective thought capacity, or collaborative thought processes?
- > How can we understand the organisation as *a realm of dense sensate knowledge*? The body, its facility for perception, intuition and sensory expression, is the locus of both our individual experience and our shared experience of the motility and decisions of others.
- > How do the *spaces and environments* of the organisation forge the relationships between employees, management and organisational executive? How does space and the design of space determine an employee's horizon of understanding, of their role and potential?
- > Why do dominant strategic planning models generate a 'tunnel vision' in organisations through an obsession with fixed objects and measurable objectives? How do they become capable of understanding the broader field of their activity and develop 'peripheral' vision?

> How can organisations adopt (and/or re-create) powerful means of self-reflection and reflexive planning by using design and design methods?

There are several chapters in *Experiencing Organisations* on the subject of 'design' (such as Warren and Eagen 'Design Thinking as Multi-epistemic Intelligence'; and Bob Robertson's 'Thinking through Design'). Design is becoming more important to management and organization studies. There are, of course, celebrity designers and the phenomenon of the 'artist-designer', but most design concerns teams and projects and management, leadership and organizational contexts. The design of new products, for example, produces realms of knowledge that can be employed and deployed within other non-design management and organizational contexts (beyond mainstream NPD and mainstream Innovation Management). Design is not merely a form of production, but a form of analysis, requiring research, and a process by which current realities can be evaluated and problems identified.

Design is a praxis, to use the old Marxist expression – it is at once both theory and practice. Design requires a theoretical basis in order to generate a method, and cannot be activated without a method. The randomness and spontaneity of fine art or performance does not play a major role in design. In design the distinction between creativity and innovation is not that significant, unless style becomes detached from the structural integrity of its object (i.e. becomes decorative). The 'new' in new design is relative in value to the way the object addresses a give state of affairs or pre-existing problems – where such have already been conceptualized within the world of life and work.

My own chapter in the book concerns a designer and the subject of 'workplace aestheticization', a subject addressed by another chapter in the book. Sam Warren's chapter is intriguing: called 'Organisational Topophilia' and drawing on field research conducted on an IT company, it asserts that employees are as often aware of the environmental surroundings of their company location (e.g. the landscape outside the office building), as they are of the internal environment of their immediate work space. Warren's thesis is that the inside and the outside of a workplace are intrinsically related, related that is in the dynamic that is the employees' experience. The employees in their account of their own experience made reference more to their

proximity to a window and the available view, and the places they could go during their breaks, than they did their immediate workstation.

My own chapter is essentially about space, which I explore through an account of the work of one designer. I hesitate to call him a spatial designer. He is a product designer who now works with a 'total design' approach, where, as for Bauer and Eagen, design becomes both a form of thought and a management of what we may call 'innovation situations'. The designer, I call him Rogers, is both MD and chief designer of his own small company, about 6-8 employees. They offer a range of design services (from product, to work station, interior, brand, corporate communications, graphics and web design) and will use or combine all of them in the service of transforming an organisation's environment. They are usually hired when an organization re-locates, as relocation is becoming a serious (and specialized) operation in the life of a company – not least because re-location is often part of a strategic re-organisation and thus change management process. For Rogers, 'transformation' is an important term. Influenced by Bauhaus design (which, to be frank, is more an intellectual influence than a serious influence on design method or strategy), he attempts to develop the kind of relationship with a client that promotes a willingness to engage in radical change – addressing serious corporate issues as part of the change.

Space is something normally taken for granted – seemingly obvious, measurable, controlled and identified through a variety of new management strategies (Spatial Planning, Production Flow Planning, Human Resources Management and Facilities Management), and invariably conceived in outmoded naturalistic or empiricist terms. Space is an 'empty void' to be 'filled' with objects and people according to a plan that promises to deliver optimum and sustained production. The space of the workplace, however, has recently become complex and replete with 'invisible forces', from wi-fi to CCTV surveillance, communication technologies, lighting design and acoustics management. Adding to this the workplace has advanced immeasurably in terms of conveniences and comforts, from convenient office layout, environment-friendly materials, air quality control and ergonomic furniture. Add to this the increased legal and regulatory frameworks for rights and health, safety and quality standards, the employee feels as if the environment is designed 'for them' as much as for the labour process.

The changes in the spaces of organisations, however, are more than just physical or empirically defined. The contemporary organisation has become a space for creativity and style, and concerned with how clients, customers and employees ‘experience’ its spaces (not just its products or services). In my chapter I describe (in broad terms) the historical changes in labour patterns and mobility in Western economies, which have determined many of the objective shifts in organizational thinking about space. From this general framework I then turn to the work of my designer Rogers, and the way in which he approaches his work in organisations.

The progress made in critical research on organisational space is substantial. We find new studies on architecture and new office design (Marmot and Eley, 2000; Fawcett and Chadwick, 2007; Vidiella, 2008), on corporate space as cultural communication and artistic display (Jacobson, 1996; Biehl, 2007), space as aesthetic cognition (Cairns, 2002; Cairns, McInnes, and Robertson, 2003) or as aesthetic and symbolic production (Strati, 1999, 2001, 2009; Gagliardi, 1990, 1996). Particularly influential have been geography-based notions of the social production of space by major thinkers like Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Nigel Thrift. The general sociology of space is a similar resource (Baldry, 1999; Gieryn, 2000; 2002), particularly informing an Organisational Studies view of the spatial analysis of labour processes (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998; Halford, 2005), and the construction of labour subjects in the ideological animation of the general economy (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2003, 2008; Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003). Dale and Burrell’s *The Spaces of Organisation and the Organisation of Space* (Dale and Burrell, 2008) is, of course, a pioneering study that serves to underscore the pivotal role of space studies in OS more generally.

I now turn to two examples, (examples I do not use in my chapter). The first is the Innocent Drinks Company’s HQ in London, endearingly called Fruit Towers. The second is the British advertising agency TBWA/Hakuhodo’s Tokyo offices. These so called environments of ‘aestheticisation’ (Hancock, 2002; Warren 2005b) are ubiquitous in the global corporate economy, and are now becoming popular in public sector organisations throughout Europe (particularly schools, for obvious reasons). They are called ‘aesthetic’ as they deliberately modify the environment so as to activate the senses of employees and stimulate their perceptual awareness of the environment. These two examples I have chosen specifically as they both employ signifiers of nature – in the case of Innocent, real trees and a workplace environment

largely made up of garden furniture. The metaphoric importance of the English country garden to Innocent is obvious; however, they have also deployed remnants of the historic English village, such as the red telephone box and village common seating area.

TBWA/Hakuhodo's Tokyo offices are a little less eccentric, but no less impressive: they use natural materials with which to animate a re-furbished bowling alley in a 'downtown' district of the city. The great lateral expanse of the bowling alley is used to situate mobile pre-fabricated offices (garden conservatories), along with garden furniture, large trees and plastic grass. The space can change along with the demands of projects or a workforce that continually changes in size and scope.

As a researcher my first observation is the lack of longitudinal research on these and similar spaces of 'aestheticisation'. Understanding the strategic function of the spaces – why businesses corporations would invest considerable amounts of capital in such design ventures – is easy. We have virtually no real long-term studies on the way such environments influence or determine the cognitive, perceptual and creative behaviours on the workers within them. And such research may simply be inoperative, given that (as a general observation) companies that favour such environmental design are companies that are predisposed to high staff turn-overs (sometimes because the nature of the business is high-pressure and performance-driven, as with Innocent; or operate through project cycles, as with TBWA/Hakuhodo). Employees therefore rarely inhabit these environments for long periods of time, and even if they do, the environments themselves change: for companies favouring workplace 'aestheticisation' are also prone to reconfigure or refurbish their environment on a regular basis.

There remain big questions, therefore, that must be addressed theoretically and analytically – looking at the construction of the 'aesthetic' as a component of corporate production, and the instances in which strategic management takes such environmental 'aestheticisation' as its object. In discussing the matter with my designer Rogers, he cites the strategic approaches normally taken within corporate life, and how their understanding of design is simplistic and heavily empiricist. Design is primarily understood in terms of the stylistic modification of

shape, form and colour. It is deployed in order to 'signify' something about the corporation and the nature of the work, which in turn is intended to have a 'positive' impact on the labour force. In other words, aesthetics is used as a stimulus to work more effectively, according to the character of the corporate brand (or, less interesting, corporate expectations on levels of performance). The 'cause-effect' logic of the empiricist approach to strategic aesthetics in the workplace is, (as I point out in the chapter), a means of 'manufacturing consent' within the workplace. For the workplace environment offers the employee an apparent state of optimal comfort, convenience and performance-enhancing media, along with a corporate assertiveness that demands respect. The aesthetic workplace is usually (like the Innocent HQ and TBWA/Hakuhodo) highly distinctive expression of identity. The employee is confronted with distinctive styles of working and belonging at once, forcing a question of allegiance and compliance.

I am inclined to define the new aesthetic workplace as a 'creative command economy', where creativity is a new corporate imperative and a mechanism for making extraordinary demands on the workforce. I will turn to this in a moment. The term 'command economy' however, might lead us into a one-sided pessimistic viewpoint (and somewhat myopic) concerning how the aesthetic workplace has emerged (since, say, the 1920s). In my paper I indicate that while there are profound mechanisms of workforce command and control at work in the new designed environments, we must remain aware of the 'political dimension' of changes in labour and labour force conditions, particularly since the 1950s. The new creative command economy is at one with a significant 'humanisation' of the workplace, where the articulation of human welfare, social needs, rights and freedoms have been equally cultivated.

The historical argument in my chapter is that the social processes in labour force change, and the corporate processes that have given us the new re-designed workplace environment, are animated by one and the same large-scale economic change. Without making explicit reference to a theory of capital, I observe the way that the new aesthetic environment is an explicit attempt to manage human experience and sensibility. The form of this management is significant insofar as it signals a need by the forces of production to draw on deep human resources, hitherto the exclusive preserve of the social realms of leisure, civic association or

domestic-personal life. While the 'liberalisation' and openness to employee welfare satisfies extensive legal and social demands for increased individual rights, in return the contemporary organisation demands from the worker a level of unprecedented personal, emotional and intellectual investment. Promising personal advancement and professional self-fulfillment, subjective investment is demanded. Personality, conviction, commitment, emotion and even ethical consciousness is required for advancement within the new corporate world, and these characteristics of individual subjectivity are subsequently used as a collective resource in organisational development. In an 'aestheticised' environment that cultivates advances in creative capability and individual expression, aspects of the self once 'private' or personal are now integral to the functioning of organisational life.

In my chapter I point out the way that outstanding examples of corporate environment design may look 'avant-garde' or 'funky', and even draw on 'street-style' visual lexicon, but their strategic modes of communication are actually quite 'classical'; they routinely employ colour codes, iconography, empirical stylistic motifs that appeal (only) to a sense of taste. The appeal to 'taste' I argue betrays a form of aesthetics that limit their communication to the human sense of vision, abstracted from any real articulation of the nature of the organization. Like art itself, the organization articulated its identity and meaning through representation (the virtual realm of imagery), and this representation had no substantive content other than to point to corporate aspirations. Employees thus live within a realm of labour that they felt to be exciting, yet where the realm of feeling was caught in an endless perpetuation of aspiration (to be perpetually creative, which in reality is an exhausting state of affairs). The TBWA/Hakuhodo example for me symbolizes a common scenario within new office space – while informal, comfortable, providing freedom of movement, socialising and mobility (no one is tied to a desk or workstation, for there is no such territorialisation of space in this radically open-planned organization). Yet such apparent liberalization entails an obliteration of privacy and a demand for 'omni-presence' or a perpetual 'on-call' alertness to the demands of the corporation.

To return to my two examples for a moment, there is a strong sense in which the aestheticization of the space of the organization attempts to 're-enchant' the

workplace in the sense of expelling a sense of alienation. This work is of course accomplished by the alienating mechanism of the aesthetic, where the actual structures of power and authority are both masked and made sensually pleasurable by the rendering of the spatial activity of labour a creative activity. The workplace is made over into a landscape of feeling – activating *our* feeling – and therefore provokes a sense of ownership. There is something about creativity that convinces us that our labour is our own, indeed it emanates from an inner-life and innate sense of purpose; at least this is the myth that is creativity. The aestheticized workplace dissolves our lurking sense of suspicion that work is always against our individual (and social-collective) interests, and always for the profit of an extraneous entity.

What first attracted me to Roger's work (after I had been introduced to him by a third party) was his use of 'nature' in his spatial design. His work at GSK's HQ in West London is a case in point: here the walls are paper with grainy but high colour saturation photography of an unidentified woodland. For me, this deliberate use of representation – where representation 'announces itself', so to speak; it displays the materiality of its own medium – speaks against the 'naturalisation' of nature within the aforementioned trendy office spaces. In Roger's work, nature is something that can only be represented, but never evoked directly; it is something we have lost, and the forms of corporate life that now dominate economy and society alike are inimical to 'the natural'. Of course, nature is almost always a metaphor for 'the human', and here [in another example] in Roger's offices, natural materials are used to 'interrupt' the space. He introduces an emphatic opposition between the natural and manufactured within his designed environments. Alienation is the very structure of our relationship with our environment, and Roger's design raises our consciousness of that fact.

Turning to Rogers' method more specifically, when I first began research in around 2009 I assumed he was working with a current version of 'design ethnography'. Rogers both embeds himself in the organizational environment he is charged with working on. The first stage is a design audit. The audit assesses the historical, aesthetic and cultural dimension of the workplace environment. The 'historical' is effectively involves looking at the space and how it emerged in the form it has: this stage will involve scrutiny of two orders of document, (i) the original building,

design or architectural plans (or even brand scheme, if this was the mechanism for the environment design); and (ii) the organisation's catalogue of representations of itself. For the 'space' of the organization is an imaginary where the organization constructs visual fictions, often referred to as its 'identity'. The organisation's identity is not something that can be 'viewed' in terms of one image or scene before one's eyes – it is formed from successive deployment of a range of imagery, usually endorsed and circulated or published by the organisation itself (portraits on its walls; photographic histories in its boardroom; aerial photographs in its brochures, and so on).

Historical – origin and strategic context of space	Aesthetic – form (style, shape, structure)	Cultural – design meaning and content
Corporate Strategy/spatial policy	Materials	Values
Designer	Properties	Style
Brief	Contours	Fashion/trend
Layout	Surface and textures	Symbolism
Technology, innovations, physical additions	Visual structure	Scales and proportions
Employee response	Colour scheme or code	Lines of sight and communication
Registered change	Articulation of detail, foci, signage or information	Employee modification/ personalisation
	Imagery	Visitor experience

Diagram 1: Components of the Design Audit.

The 'common consciousness' (or corporate 'sensus communis', after Kant's term) is where the identity of the organization resides, and each manager or director can acknowledge that identity in different ways.

Second, Rogers looks at the people (employees, including the physical-spatial relationship between employees and management, or the spatial distribution of the hierarchy) involving a diagnostic role for Rogers. First, Rogers attempts to discern

the authorial role of the management (perhaps devolved management responsibility for space, to the 'facilities' or 'estates' department, for example). The management give orders but are rarely 'authors' of the space. Attempting to discern how a space comes to be used can be a complicated activity, and begins with embedded observation. Rogers will spend a considerable time sitting around and talking to people, attempting to understand how people use the space, and how the space is animated by the relations between them. This forms what he called a 'space of communication', which is a kind of third dimension affected by his presence as designer and interlocutor. This involves discussing the location and distribution of particular people within space, the systems of production that are implied by the space and the way the space is 'directed' by those responsible. Spaces are complex, for they feature micro-territories of ownership, orbits of influence, traffic routes, dead spaces, decorative spaces, concealed spaces, all bound up together.

This second stage is, therefore, an exercise in organizational phenomenology, for the task Rogers sets himself is a comprehension of what the space 'means' to its users as registered in their movement and physical negotiation of its expanses and enclosures. His tools are interviews and discussion with 'local' users; visual observations (and descriptive note taking); and 'mapping' or sketching the flows and contractions in movement throughout the space (often undertaken with a floor plan drawing. Actual architectural floor-plans can be deceiving in their very objectivity: for they suggest a structural 'logic' to the space that, in reality, does not equate to the flow of motion and experience that animates that space from day to day.

Rogers' third stage of practice is an extension of the second insofar as his observations on the use of space are coextensive with discussions with employees concerning the power of the space – space as power, as a realm of authority. This again has two sides to it, the first being concerned with the architectural morphology and the actual physical control of the environment through objects and machines; the second looks at how power manifests itself in attitudes and experiences, requiring further (more individual) discussion with users of the space. The 'users' in this category are often not just the employees as such, but all who 'cross' or encounter the space (perhaps freelancers, sub-contractors,

visitors, clients, or whomever). Office spaces, Rogers observes, feature a range of critical “time-corridors” moving in and around the space, often compressing movement or creating nodes of tension, affecting certain individuals, playing to the advantage of others.

Rogers ultimate priority is communication. For him, the purpose of design is to facilitate communication. And communication is not simply ‘sending messages’, but a meaningful exchange and interaction, where the users of the space are free to articulate their experience and aspirations. For Rogers, communication requires *aesthetic conditions* to become central to the formation of organisational space. And it is mistaken to think of an environment being set up (or ‘designed’) to allow for effective communication: design with an empiricist basis does as much. The organizational subject is not simply an entity that can send messages, or talk. The space facilitates communication, yes, but the communication also facilitates the evolution of the space along with changing conceptions of it. The space becomes dynamic as communication becomes the fulcrum of the space. But to understand communication in the sense in which Rogers uses the term, we need to understand the required aesthetic conditions.

Communication, therefore, is not merely linguistic, and not just about the freedom or situation for talk. The aesthetic conditions of communication include ‘lines’ of physical interrelation that are formed by the spatial distribution of open areas and ‘rest’ places. The lines of communication are reinforced by ‘lines of sight’, where the space is legible to the eyes and senses. The space ‘explains’ itself to the user. This does not work though the space somehow illustrating a rational plan (an plans are usually abstract theory in architectural form). The Fordist factory and its battery-grid of work stations was, of course, a manifest theory of labour production, and whose plans seemed perfectly logical. The de-humanising and demoralization (and ultimately counter-productive) impact of such forms of spatial rationalization are now well known. Rather, ‘legible’ space is a space whose meaning unfolds as the subject interacts with it. It generates identity through narratives generated by the experience of production (and not through imposed grids of behavior). For this to happen, an open regime of communication must be governing the space. Other aesthetic conditions are access and mobility, temporal flow, and encounter and detachment, where communication generate relations

between employees that emerge from an expanding realm of experience and thus knowledge. Unlike the enforced 'open-plan' equalitarianism, bought at the cost of each individual's sense of place, the morphology of this kind of space is not pre-formed.

And here is my conclusion: in the work of Rogers (and possibly many other designers working with organizational space I am not aware of) we find a latent design method, which is able to uncover realms of meaning and power usually opaque to the researcher. While ethnographic-driven research can usually charter the same intellectual territory and open the same epistemic vistas, only with the designer (or similar role) can research and *actual change* be co-joined. The nature of this change varies, depending on the negotiated relationship between designer and management. However it points to significant possibilities for exploring organizational aesthetics and also the cultural politics of strategic management.

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